



RESPONSE TO PETITION

No.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Petition tabled by Mr. Kevin O'Reilly on June 29, 2016

Response by the Honourable Louis Sebert, Minister of Justice

Closure of M.M. de Weerd Law Library

The Department of Justice is aware that the decision to close the M.M. de Weerd Law Library has been a matter of concern to a number of Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to some members of the public. The decision to close the Law Library was not arrived at lightly.

The Department of Justice, along with all departments, was required to identify expenditure reductions during the most recent budget planning cycle. In 2015/16, the cost of the Library was \$467,000 with 984 visits and 385 books signed out, which represents a cost of almost \$500 for each discrete visit and \$1200 for each book signed out. Usage of the Library has steadily decreased over the years, a trend largely attributable to an increasing preference for online resources.

The Department is developing plans to create a Resource Centre in place of the Library, in which the public and members of the Bar can access free online resources. The Centre will feature terminals that can be used at no charge for online legal research, a select collection of hard copy materials and scheduled periods where staff support will be available to assist members of the public. It will also be available to members of the Bar at all hours through a fob entry system. The available resources will be enhanced through the continued operation of an interlibrary loan system. In the near term, the Law Library is operating as usual, and the collection will continue to be available until renovations are undertaken for the new Resource Centre.

The Department of Justice has undertaken a number of initiatives to assist members of the public to access justice services. This fall the Legal Aid Commission will be significantly enhancing outreach legal aid services, and will make duty counsel available for those appearing in family law chambers without requiring a legal aid application. This will provide a very useful resource for unrepresented litigants. The Department has also collaborated with partners in the preparation of the "NWT Justice Services, Programs and Resources Inventory". This will assist members of the public seeking legal information and direction to services. As of late 2015, Court Registries has piloted an extension of its hours to permit full noon hour access to the registries. This

summer, the Department has also implemented an online fine payment system to increase public access by allowing individuals to pay fines at their convenience.

In the coming months the Department of Justice will continue to work in partnership with the Law Society of the Northwest Territories and other interested parties to ensure the transition from the Law Library to the Resource Center continues to advance access to justice in the NWT.